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HARMONIES

M. A. DE WOLFE HOWE





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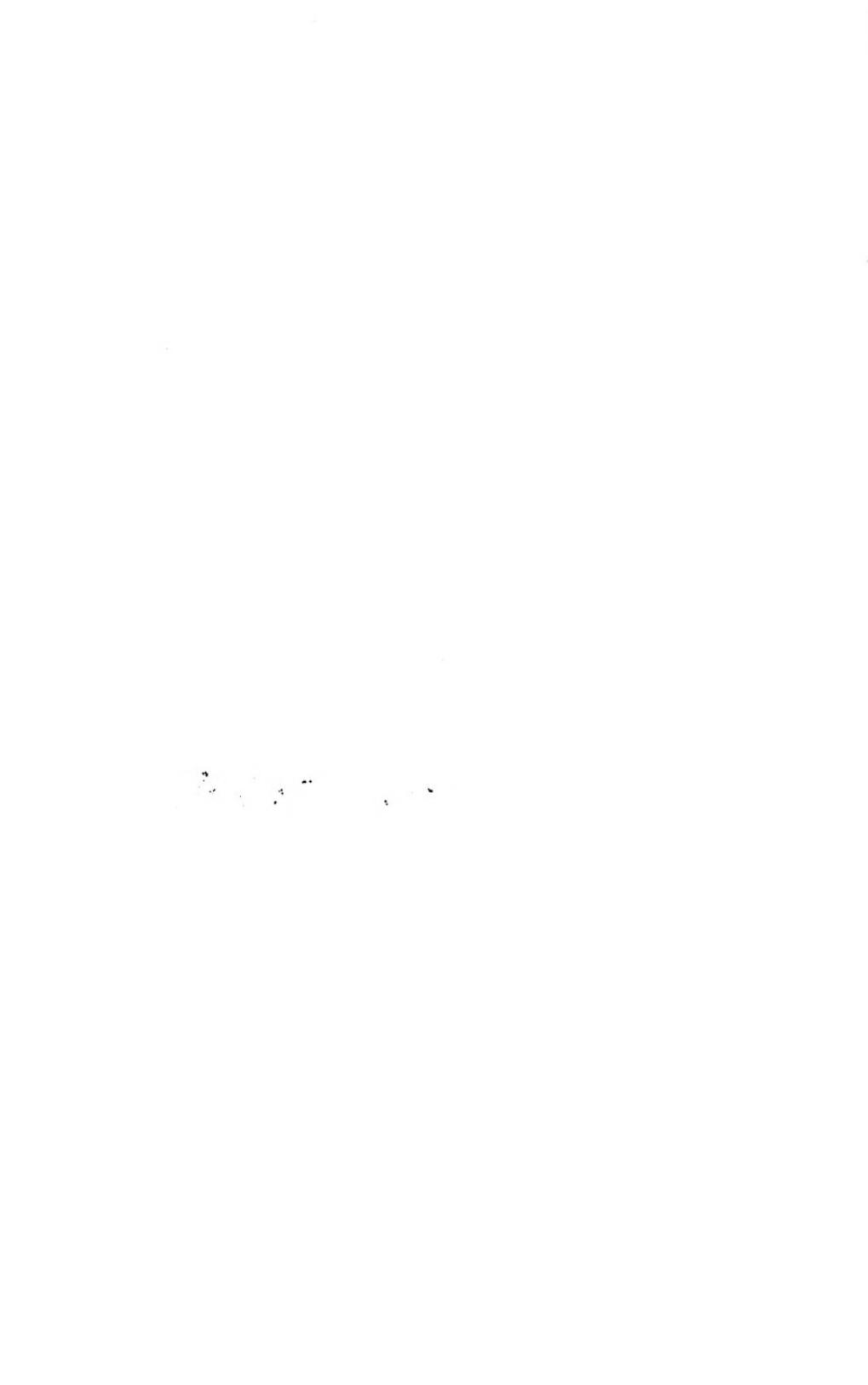
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HARMONIES

A Book of Verse



HARMONIES

A BOOK OF VERSE

BY

M. A. DE WOLFE HOWE



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NOTE

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HARMONIES

THE SONG TO THE SINGER

*They will not know who read and sing
What you and I know who have known
How fair I was that day of spring
I bade you mould me for your own.*

*These words which half reveal my soul
Are how much more to you and me !
Pellucid beauties, clear and whole,
Behind, around them all we see.*

*Above this faltering tune that tells
The measure I must walk within,
For us a sweeter music wells --
The magic strain that should have been.*

*Yet this is better than to die,
And you had joy of me one day ;
Then you are mine, and yours am I --
Who likes us not may go his way.*

HARMONIES

STRANGE instrument of many strings
For men to play on, slaves and kings,
Let me but keep thee, Life, in tune,
That fall what may, by night or noon,
Still in the heart shall sing for me
One clear and constant melody.

Too oft the clamor and the strife
Of living quench the notes of life;
Too oft they lose their customed way,
In alien sequences to stray.
Yet ever stealing back, they fall
Into the cadence sought through all.

Then grief and gladness, love and pain
Blend all their harmonies again;

HARMONIES

The heavens uplift a shining arch
Spacious above the soul's brave march:
If I but keep thee, night and noon,
Ever and truly, Life, in tune —
Strange instrument of many strings
For slaves to play on, and for kings.

LAUS DIONYSI

(For Music)

CHORUS: *Men, Women, Boys*

SPRING ON THE LAND

SPRING on the vineyards of Attica! Spring on the
land,

All the dear land of the Hellenes loved of the
sun!

The god Dionysus immortally breathes his com-
mand,

And the bars of the prison of winter dissolve, and
are gone!

He hath slept — he awakes; he stirs on the hills —
he is free,

And the blood at the bountiful heart of the earth
throbs again;

Blue is the sky overhead and blue is the sea,
And green roll the billows on laughing valley and
plain.

The sap, to the uttermost tendrils, is quick in the
vine;

It shall creep, it shall mount, till the spheres of
delight take form;

They shall blush, they shall swell,— and their
blood flowing red in the wine
Shall be one with the life-blood of men, all
vibrant and warm.

Who but thee, Dionysus, hath guarded the vine-
yards at first?

Their fruit at the last shall be turned to thy
kingly employ;

And cool at the lips of sorrowing mortals athirst
Flows ever thy chalice of kinship and freedom and
joy.

CHORUS: *Women*

THE BIRTH OF DIONYSUS

Semele, a woman, bore thee:
We, her mortal sisters, know
All she won and suffered for thee —
All her ecstasy and woe.

Io Bacche,

Io Bacche,

Daughters of the sun-kissed grape
Joy nor anguish may escape.

Semele besought her lover:
“Zeus, effulgent king, draw nigh!
All thy splendor now uncover
As to Hera throned on high!”

Io Bacche,

Io Bacche,

Daughters of the mystic vine

Ever crave a heavenly sign.

“Semele, I come.” And round her

Blazed a glory, lightning-torn.

Blinded, stricken, dead, they found her —

Yet was Dionysus born.

Io Bacche,

Io Bacche,

Daughters of the mortal race

Dying still to life give place.

Child of Semele, we sing thee

Hymns of holy mysteries;

Nature’s next of kin we bring thee

Earth’s eternal sympathies.

Io Bacche,
Io Bacche,
Daughters of the soul's desire
Joyful guard thy death-lit fire.

CHORUS: *Men*

THE TOKENS OF DIONYSUS

By the cup at thy leathern girdle,
For the draught that sweetens toil,
Thou art brother to all the brethren
That conquer the stubborn soil.
For thou hast yoked to our service
The sun, the night, and the rain;
And thy grateful vinesmen pay thee
With toll of sweat and pain.
That the wine of the victors' vintage
May gush from the barren sod
Thou sealest thy sons, the chosen ones,
To follow the victor-god.

By the fawn-skin on thy shoulder,
Got with the price of blood,
Thou art one with the creature kindred
Of thicket and field and wood.

But the comrades of the forest
Must fall at thy children's will
When the lust of blood is on them,
The passion of man to kill;
For the spell of a savage fury
Reigns where the brutes have trod,
And ever thy sons, the chosen ones,
Must follow the victor-god.

By the bull's horn at thy forehead
The Chosen share thy might —
Lusty of limb and fibre,
Framed for the hard-won fight.

By the pledge of the fertile pine-cone
That crowns thy wreathèd staff

With the token of life's renewals,
Men fling at Death their laugh:
O'er all his conquests conqueror,
Thy feet with triumph shod,
Thou sealest thy sons, the chosen ones,
To follow the victor-god.

CHORUS: *Boys*

THE WINE OF YOUTH

With shout and song and Bacchic cry
Thy worshippers go reeling by,
Their lips all dyed with ruddy juice,
Their tattered goatskins flying loose.
Wild creatures from the coverts come
To join the rout with antics dumb,
And man and satyr mingled seem
Like some mad figment of a dream.
Women with streaming locks unbound

Whirl tempest-like thine altars round;
For men with eyes of roving fire
The sacrifice flames high and higher.
The grape, the grape! on every tongue
Its praise and thine together sung!

And we — the youngest-born of earth,
O youngest of immortal birth,
Need yet no draught of autumn wine
To bring our hearts in tune with thine.
We press no grape to drink our fill
Of exaltation: ours to thrill
From heart to prickling finger-tip
With wine that staineth not the lip,
The wine of youth, the wine of youth:—
Who drink it need not seek thy truth;
'T is theirs unasked — a heavenly flood,
Wine of the young heart's leaping blood!

CHORUS: *Men, Women, Boys*

SPRING IN THE HEART

Spring in the heart, Eleutherios, highest of names!

The bonds of the spirit are broken; the prisoned
go free!

Mortal to mortal, emancipate, joyous, proclaims
Spring in the heart, Dionysus, springtime from
thee!

Fettered of darkness and cold lay the children of
men,—

For vision a dimness, the soul but a perishing
slave,—

Till the light and the warmth of thy being spread
earthward, and then —

Then what a glamor and glory thy godhead out-
gave!

Eyes that were lustreless shine with all beauty's
delight,

Flashing to grace and to color their signal, their
gleam;

Murmurs of song thrill sweet on the soundless
night,

Music of reeds and the wind on a magical stream.

Lips that were dumb break forth in thy passionate
praise,

For spring in the heart, Dionysus, is light to the
blind;

The ways of the spirit of song, love and life are thy
ways —

Flame of the fires of youth at the heart of man-
kind!

FINALITIES

I

THE AMBUSH

SUDDEN turnings of the trail,
Fading footprints, clues that fail —
What may not these portents mean
When the Foe is all unseen,
And each fated pioneer
Fares along the grim frontier?

Lurking somewhere, left or right,
Near the pathway, safe from sight,
In his ambush subtly laid,
Stands the patient, hostile Shade.
Come you marching like a king;
Like a craven loitering,

Still the unconquerable Foe
Waits your coming: forward go.

Thus along the grim frontier
Fares each fated pioneer.

II

THE LAST ENEMY

FOR my destined last defeat
Naught of mercy I entreat;
Only borne to earth and faint
May I fall without complaint;
But, dear Foe, for them I love
All thy mercy would I move.
Torture not their end with vain
Long vicissitudes of pain;
Though they feel thee lurking near,
Let their brave hearts laugh at fear:

Then bestow thy sweetest gift,

Smiting merciful and swift.

Yet — yet may the stroke be stayed

Till at evening, undismayed,

They shall seize the vision far

Of one reassuring star!

Foe no longer, friendly death,

So thy horror vanisheth.

THE VALIANT

Not for the star-crowned heroes, the men that
conquer and slay,
But a song for those that bore them, the mothers
braver than they!
With never a blare of trumpets, with never a surge
of cheers,
They march to the unseen hazard — pale, patient
volunteers;
No hate in their hearts to steel them, — with love
for a circling shield,
To the mercy of merciless nature their fragile
selves they yield.
Now God look down in pity, and temper Thy
sternest law;
From the field of dread and peril bid Pain his troops
withdraw!

Then unto her peace triumphant let each spent
victor win,

Though life be bruised and trembling, — yet, lit
from a flame within

Is the wan sweet smile of conquest, gained with-
out war's alarms,

The woman's smile of victory for the new life safe
in her arms.

So not for the star-crowned heroes, the men that
conquer and slay,

But a song for those that bore them, the mothers
braver than they!

FOR THE NIGHT

GIVE me of all thy weariness, O day!
Let body, mind, and spirit so be spent
That when death's herald-brother, sleep, is sent,
Resistless, I may yield me to his sway
Till the black silence lulls me to content.

Then let the dark fall like a total shroud,
And fold me in till day again is bright,
Not lifting with the gray retreat of night,
To leave me lying mute before the crowd
Of gliding shapes that steal upon my sight.

Dread ghosts are they of all my deeds misdone
And words unspoken; shield my wakeful bed
From hours of dawn when most they rear their head,
To whisper me of ungrasped moments gone,
To mock my impotence now all is sped.

Nor give me dreams, for they will lead my feet
To walk in paths wherefrom I needs must turn
For streets of day; and though in sleep I spurn
Their semblances, and vaguely scoff the cheat,
Yet when the parting comes, the heart will burn.

Nay, as if under Death's dark still caress,
New courage silently would I attain
To fight the new day's fight — and not in vain,
If from its hours I win fresh weariness,
To make me ready for the night again.

DISTINCTION

THE village sleeps, a name unknown, till men
With life-blood stain its soil, and pay the due
That lifts it to eternal fame, — for then
'Tis grown a Gettysburg or Waterloo.

OF ELIZABETHAN POETS

OUR later singers vaunt their new-turned lays,
Doubling, they say, the world's poetic store;
We turn to pages writ in Shakespeare's days,
And lo! the songs have all been sung before.

THE UNSEEN PANOPLY

HE is dead — the towering chief,
And the world must say farewell
With the grandeur of public grief,
With pageant and chant and knell,
With the heavy fragrance of flowers,
And the lingering march of those
Who would hold the headlong hours
When eternity presses close.

Thus for the soul far sped
Let his ashes honored be,
For the master of men is dead,
And but once come such as he.

As he sank, an infant's breath
Flickered and paused and ceased;
To serve at the rites of death

THE UNSEEN PANOPLY

Came father, mother, and priest.

Where were the stately show,

Dirge and garlands and pall?

Where was the pomp of woe? —

Two hearts enwrapped it all.

No echoing word was said,

There was naught for the world to see;

But the first-born child lay dead,

And but once come such as he.

THE LARK SONGS

It was not thou alone I heard,
First lark that sang from English skies,
And to mine ears seemed less a bird
Than chorister of Paradise.

Full sweet from heaven thy music fell,
Yet with it came two voices more,
Two songs that blent with thine to tell
The praise I knew of thee before.

Thy truth to home and heaven sang one —
And Wordsworth's note serene and strong,
With earth and sky in unison,
Made of thy flight itself a song.

The other blither strain I caught
Bore never a message but "Rejoice" —

Song of thy very song, methought,
Exultant with thine own glad voice.

And unto this, I knew not how,
Rose answer from the sons of men:
“The world is listening, Shelley, now,
As thou didst listen then.”

A BIRTHDAY VERSE

How fierce the storm that starless night
When she put forth alone!
Watching through tears that quenched my sight,
I paced a shore unknown.

But oh, when morning broke, and day
Smiled up across the tide,
Here in the harbor safe she lay,
Her rescue by her side!

THE PLAY

THROUGH countryside and teeming towns
The troupes of heroes, trulls and clowns,
Captains and dames of high degree,
Live out their farce, their tragedy.
Half players in this world-wide show,
Half lookers-on, 't is ours to go
Bewildered, wondering what the scene
And all its pageantry may mean;
Crudely commingled, bad and good,
Nothing complete, naught understood.

Are we then doomed till death to gaze
Distraught on life's chaotic plays?
Are there no spectacles more fair?
Yes, in those blest dominions where
The flying strands of life are caught

By magic, and by art are wrought
To fabrics for the still delight
Of eyes that shine with spirit sight.

Here from the soul spring questionings
Straight to the inmost heart of things;
Here all the sons of Shakespeare dwell
And all the daughters of Rachel.

To every baffled fugitive
From life's disorder still they give
Laughter and tears — and grace to see
The truth in life's epitome.

PROPORTION

THERE rose a star above the hill
Across the bay;
Through the night-spaces vast and still
Shone the great ray;
Beneath it glowed a lesser light
By mortal lit,
Yet through the dark a path as bright
Led back to it.

Here in the day a bird flies by,
Above the trees;
On other vision bent, mine eye
Unheeding sees.
Was it a distant eagle's wing
That clove the blue,

Or some near insect harvesting

The honey's dew?

If eyes deceive, then let my soul

See clear and straight;

Through all appearance, part and whole

Stand separate!

Know, soul, what things are near, what far,

Sift great from small;

Seize, soul, — whate'er the visions are, —

The truth in all.

THE SEA VOICE

Up from the harbor side,
Over the city's midmost hush of night,
Swell, like a flooding tide,
The insistent voice of some great ship,
Deep-throated, as a man of might,
Calling, perchance, new greeting to the land
Now safe at hand;
Or it may be with bugle at her lip,
Seaward she flings the first far-reaching cry
Of that vast speech of hers, whereby
She sounds her way from strand to strand,
Through ocean's fog and storm and mystery.

Housed safe ashore, deep down
Beneath the mountain clamor of the town,
Never by day comes clear to me

That rough old voice of the sea.
Only in chance-caught silences men hear,
As if by night, the ages' tale, —
All are but dwellers by a shore,
Mariners waiting their command to sail
Forth on the uncharted sea each must explore,
So strange a sea, so near.

THE EVANGEL

THE songs of Christmas had not ceased
Upon the New Year's air
When first from realms unknown released
Her spirit sought our care.

And 'mid the watch with hope and dread
Hark! in the dawn-light dim
A child's voice in the room o'erhead
Wakes with a crooning hymn.

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All thoughtless sings the boy; —
Shall lisping lips foretell the flight
Of fear, the flood of joy!

Fear not — still hear the herald sing
The treasured words of old;

Glad tidings of great joy I bring —

The ancient truth is told!

For now the first small plaintive cry
Of life stirs with the morn,
And heaven to earth again draws nigh —
To us a child is born.

Thus came the Child of God to earth;
And since the world began
An angel song for each dear birth
Rings in the heart of man.

UNCONQUERED

HIGH o'er the city's roofs a storm-blown gull,
Driven landward from the sea,
Battles against the winds without a lull,
Yet inland farther, ever back,
Helpless is tossed with flying rack;
But, messenger of constancy to me,
I joy to see him facing ocean still,—
As beaten souls through storm and night
May changeless face the hidden light
By heaven-sent power and strength of steadfast
will.

THE HELMSMAN

WHAT shall I ask for the voyage I must sail to the
end alone?

Summer and calms and rest from never a labor done?

Nay, blow, ye life-winds all; curb not for me your
blast,

Strain ye my quivering ropes, bend ye my trembling
mast.

Then there can be no drifting, thank God! for boat
or me, —

Eager and swift our course over a living sea.

Mine is a man's right arm to steer through fog and
foam;

Beacons are shining still to guide each farer home.

Give me your worst, O winds! others have braved
your stress;

E'en if it be to sink, give me no less, no less.

BY THE SHORE

TOWN-BELLS over the land,
Fog-bells over the sea;
On the beach between in the mist I stand,
And each bell calls to me.

Out of the fog I hear:
“Come, I am cool and sweet;
My veil shall wrap thee away from fear,
My paths shall rest thy feet.

“Come, as the ship that came
Into me on a morn of gray;
Follow it, naming Love’s dear name,
And find what it bore away.

“Find? Yes, so it may chance;
Yet come for the respite’s sake;

Enough that I pledge you my ocean's trance
And oblivion — come, and take!"

And the land-bells ring me: "Here,
Here are the fixed and true;
We ring for the lifted mists, the clear,
Sure noons of gleaming blue.

"Out into the day we call
You and your peers, like men,
Girt as ye are, to win and fall,
And falling to win again.

"Strength is yours for a shield;
Take heart, and grasp it fast!
Come, and bear from the hard-fought field
The guerdon of love at last!"

BY THE SHORE

On the beach in the mist I stand,
And voices are calling me,—
Town-bells over the land,
Fog-bells over the sea.

FLAGS AT HALF-MAST

BUT yesterday the winds of hope
Took heart of every banner high,
And sped across each peopled slope
And port of ships beneath the sky.

Now to the colors drooping low
The winds creep heavily, and pass,
Bearing a weight of public woe;
Alas for yesterday, alas!

THE DEATH

I SHUDDER not when back I bend
My thought on life's first painful breath;
Nor will I tremble for the end —
The last is only death.

To fear this death would shame my birth,
Yet lowers a death I fear to die —
Even before our inn, the earth,
Has place for me to lie.

It shall o'ertake me when the face
Of spring or winter speaks no word,
When wind and water stir apace
And naught but sound is heard;

When walking in the silent wood
I find no spirit breathing there,

No presence in the solitude
Else spreading everywhere.

It shall befall when, deaf to hear
And dumb to speak what heart tells heart,
Through one long winter of the year
I fare from friends apart;

When noble music, tale, or deed
Warms not the blood to swifter flow,
When numb alike to art and need
In dull content I grow:—

This were the dread and inmost fate,
And burial were the end thereof,
Should dearth of loving, known too late,
Lose me the way to love.

THE ORCHESTRA

UPON the mountain's morning side
The players, all in feathered coats,
On tree-tops swing, in thickets hide,
And sound preliminary notes.

The violinists here and there
Tune all their many strings unseen;
Long sloping tones are in the air,
With pizzicato bits between.

Hark! 't is a flute's roulade so near
That revels gay and unafraid!
And there! the clarinet rings clear
Its mellow trill from yonder glade.

The gentle tappings of a drum
Sound where the beeches thinner grow;

Nearer a humorist is come
Upon his droll bassoon to blow.

And now a 'cello from afar
Breathes out its human, dim appeal —
A voice as from a distant star
Where mortals work their woe and weal.

Then down a sylvan aisle I gaze,
And to my musing sense it seems
A leader mounts a log, and sways
His baton like a man of dreams.

And here behold a marvel wrought!
For marshalled in a concord sweet
The blending fragments all are brought
To tune and harmony complete.

Is it a masterpiece that men
Have heard before — and found it good?
Is this the Rheinland o'er again?
Am I with Siegfried in the wood?

Nay — for this priceless hour 't is mine
To share with Nature's audience
A symphony too rare and fine
For skill of human instruments.

Leader, what music hast thou stirred!
Players, still heed him every one!
And God be thanked for every bird
That sings beneath the May-day sun!

THE FIRST OF SPRING

WHAT jingling tumult spans the air
From where the brook runs swift and bright?—
The host of hylas piping there,
Or winter's sleigh-bells faint with flight?

WEEPING WILLOWS

THE first to don the green at winter's death,
Last, ere he lives again, to lay it by,—
Like tears are ye, that spring with man's first
breath,
And loyally attend him till he die.

INTERPRETATION

THESE gentle lines of Nature's face
Are like a living face I love,
And keen mine eyes have grown to trace
What signs soe'er across it move.

To stranger eyes a peace serene
Broods over all, from east to west;
For them 't is as a painted scene;
For me it quivers with unrest.

Now on the water something stirs —
A sail, a breeze, a flotsam thing;
Now from the point of junipers
The birds fly out on seaward wing.

Slow creatures o'er the pasture stray,
The shadows up the hillside run;

And lo! through all the changeful day
The miracles of wind and sun.

The signal colors of the year
Are mine to watch with heedful eye;
The gradual seasons drawing near
Claim vigilance and constancy.

Unseen or clear the changes fall,
And Nature's face that seems so still
Is full of motion mystical
And boding signs for good or ill.

But ah! the spirit hid within —
When shall I learn its ways to trace?
The subtler skill when shall I win,
And learn to read that living face?

THE HORIZON AT SEA

A LINE inexorably straight,
In larger truth, a girdling ring,
Fixed either way as firm as fate,
And always onward beckoning;

Clear-cut and far, or near and blurred,
As powers of sun and cloud decree,
By these thy provocations stirred,
We seek the farthest mystery.

Emblem of boundaries strictly set,
Emblem of venturous search and hope,
Circled by thee can man forget
His limitation and his scope?

THE FIELD-DAY

A YELLOW banner first was seen

Where every willow stood,
Long, long before a hint of green
Had touched the hillside wood.

Then, as if autumn had come back,
A glow of red returned
To all the maple branches black,
Whereon a dark fire burned.

“Now strike your bleak and shivering tents!”
The signals gave the word.
“Form, companies and regiments!”
And all the army stirred.

The marching orders of the year
Were thus proclaimed at last;

The field-day of the spring was near,
The winter bivouac past.

In suits of green they decked them out,
Like Robin Hood's brave band;
The May winds rallied with a shout,
The warm sun lit the land.

The orchard trees must lead the van
With banners pink and white;
And so they gathered clan by clan,
And formed their lines aright.

Then was the great commander heard,
And the order came to march;
And music fell from every bird
Beneath the heavens' high arch.

From street and lane and park and field,
From road and hill and shore,
The great green army wound and wheeled
Across the world once more.

“HOAR-FROST LIKE ASHES”

AN autumn field gave back the moon’s wan smile;
Each gazed at each, like lovers pale and fair;
When morning came and wondering laughed awhile,
An ashen glory lingered everywhere.

WINTER BEAUTY

HERE stands a parable in all men’s sight:
'Mid the green grass yon bowlder showed but
gray.
Now snows have clasped it in their frame of
white,—
'Tis green with lichens, as the early May.

A TREE

BLOWN all one way I saw it stand
Forth from its fellows of the wood
That faced the sea-winds on the strand,
A tall, unflinching brotherhood.

Compassed by them, it might have grown
In strength and symmetry like theirs,
Not leaning landward now alone,
Like one unfriended, bent with cares.

The winds had shaped it, — so I mused,
And gathered round I seemed to see
The forms of creatures, storm-blown, bruised,
Resting beneath their kinsman tree.

Some were the men bent all one way
By blasts of bitterness and wrong,

Doomed to a single-handed fray,
Too weak to meet a foe so strong.

The winds of poverty and loss
Of all that man counts dear on earth —
Whether the gold be gold or dross —
Had shapen some to forms of dearth.

And those there were whose backs were bowed
By breezes they had thought all fair;
Prospered and loved too much, they showed
Distorted as the ugliest there.

Alien to joy, to sorrow near,
The subtler pains most subtly felt,
All the sad company was here,
Wherein misforming grief had dwelt.

And now the wind-bent tree is more
Than tree unto mine inmost ken,
For in its image by the shore
I see the world-bent forms of men.

GOLDENROD

THE dying summer, loath to lay aside
Its customed many-colored robe of pride,
With the last effort of a vanquished god,
Skirts all its fields and roads with goldenrod.

REVELATION

OUR air hangs full of dust specks seen by none,
Until a shaft of light, as from a bow,
Pierces its arrowy way from God's clear sun,
And shows what stuff we're breathing here below.

FIRE OF APPLE-WOOD

THE windows toward the east and north
Rattle and drip against the storm.
Though spring, without, has ventured forth,
Only the fireside here is warm.

Through wind-swept sheets of driven rain
The ancient orchard shows forlorn,
Like brave old soldiery half slain,
With gaps to tell the losses borne.

And fragments of the fallen trees
Burn on the hearth before me bright.
The fire their captive spirit frees;
Musing, I watch it take its flight.

In embers flushed and embers pale
Sparkle the blooms of some far spring;

Of bees and sunshine what a tale
Told in a moment's flowering!

How swift the flames of gold and blue
Up from the glowing logs aspire!
There yellowbird and bluebird flew,
And oriole, each with wings of fire.

Now in the hearth-light — or the trees —
Stirs something they and I have heard:
Ah, is it not the summer breeze,
Come back to us with sun and bird?

Poor summers, born again — to die!
Quickly as they have come, they go.
See, where the ashes smouldering lie,
The orchard floor is white with snow.

BROKEN STILLNESS

SAY you the gentlest note of Nature's speech
Falls with the last faint raindrops of the spring,
Or murmurs in the tide along the beach,
Or in the leaves to slow winds answering?
Gentle are these, but gentler, hark! how low —
The sibilant whisper of the falling snow.

BEFORE THE SNOW

THE yellow flame of goldenrod
Is spent, and by the road instead,
The flowers, like smoke-wreaths o'er the sod,
Hang burned and dead.

The sumac cones of crimson show
Beyond the roadside, black and charred;
The trees, a bloodless, ashen row,
Stand autumn-scarred.

Dark are the field-fires of the year;
Let all the flickering embers die!
Without, the cold white days are near;
Within are warmth — and you, and I.

SONG

Is it that I am poor in love?

Nay, dear, unless it be
My poverty, forsooth, I prove
By love for none but thee.

Is it through wealth of love that men

Can see the first fires die,
And give their hearts again, again?
Then thrice a pauper I!

But since to thee I 've given all
That, rich or poor, was mine,
I can abide whate'er befall
The gift, dear, now 't is thine.

BITTER-SWEET

THEY gave the garden Friendship's name,
And planted many a seed,
Unthinking, till a wizard came
And did a wondrous deed.

Where one seed lay he touched his wand,
And high all else above,
Sprang full-blown, fair all flowers beyond,
The blood-red flower of Love.

Then one said, "Come, be friends again,"
But ah! what magic cry
Can bid the bloom grow back? 'T is vain!
The bittered flower must die.

THE BLIND

IN empty days now left behind,
I asked why Love was counted blind.

No answer came until I learned
What every lover has discerned :

The blind — my answer ran — are reft
Of one thing, but how much is left!

Touch, hearing, every quickened sense
Thrills with an impulse thrice intense.

And so when Love has filled the heart,
Dull man awakes in every part;

Undreamed-of potencies are rife
Within him, crying “Sweet is life!”

And if half-blindness be his lot,
What matter — since he knows it not?

GIVING AND KEEPING

BETTER than thy gift, dear friend,
Rare and precious though it be,
Is the thing thou couldst not send
From thy inmost heart to me.

Who am I to say thee so?
Who but one taught long and well
That from out the hand can go
Naught that in the heart doth dwell?

When to thee with gem or flower,
I would offer most besides,
Then, beyond a giver's power,
Most within me still abides.

A TREASURE HOUSE

THE poet's song, the painter's art,
Are richest when they tell but part;

We hear the sweetest player, and thrill
With dreams of music sweeter still;

The spring's first brightness is so dear
Because we feel the summer near; —

Shall I not love my love the more
For keeping wealths of love in store?

A SERMON

TEN crimson drops of nature's blood,
Ten berries of the alder tree,
Saturday's gleanings from the wood,
Went to the church with you and me.

And while the learned doctor there
His theologic missiles threw,
These children of the sun and air
Sat calm and heedless — so did you.

But once I saw a small caress
Steal from your finger to their cheek
With messages of tenderness
And sympathy no word could speak.

'T was then I felt you kin to them,
Pagan and nature-bred and free;
And you and that bright woodland stem
Preached gospels of your own to me.

AT THE HEART

THE heart is but a narrow space
For paltriness to find a place;
But in its precincts there is room
Sufficient unto bliss or doom.

The certainties, so few, are there,
The doubts that feed the soul with care;
The passions battling with the will
To guide their liege to good or ill;
The saving grace of reverence,
The saving hatred of pretence;
The sympathy of common birth
With all the native things of earth:
The love begun with life, the love
That years diminish not, nor move;
And — more in such a narrow space? —
The image of a woman's face.

THE HEADSMAN

(On a picture found in an old country house)

COVERED with dust of years long dead,
And hard beset by cruel chance,
The painting and the girlish head
Bear still the grace of ancient France.

Look closer — yes — 't is poor Lamballe,
The friend of royal Antoinette,
Fair flower by Terror's fierce mistral
Cut down untimely — fragrant yet!

Now the time-darkened eyes look out
Through glass in broken forms grotesque,
With curious cobwebs hung about
In quaint festoon and arabesque.

And one grim spider in his zeal
 Across the round white throat has made
A straight line as of tarnished steel,
 In mocking memory of the blade.

Dull emblem of oblivion wrought
 Where now my hand can brush it by —
And thus a century is taught
 What once it was for her to die!

Picture and cobweb — ah, how vain
 On earth's remembrance yet to call!
The sum of beauty and of pain,
 Spider and painter tell it all.

THE FIELD OF HONOR

SOLDIER and statesman fall no more
Like Hamilton, slain in his pride;
No sailor hero seeks the shore
To die as great Decatur died;
For honor's code of murderous lust
Lies buried 'neath dishonor's dust.

Now in the dark east waits the day
Long prophesied, prayed, yearned for still,
When angered nations shall obey
God's law for men — thou shalt not kill.
Then all the codes of blood shall cease,
And fields of honor smile with peace.

THE PHYSICIAN

THE lightning spark, the flowering field,
The chemic lore of every land —
All nature and all science yield
Their tribute to his healing hand.

These garnered wonders of the earth
He carries to each home of pain,
Where, through some spell of magic worth,
His gentle strength brings hope again.

And rooms of darkness grow to light,
And life beloved gains yet a span.
Hail him who stays the march of night,
God's present minister to man !

GEOGRAPHY

WHEN you were once in Italy
Its consecrated map
Glowed like an ancient broidery
Immune from time's mishap.

And where you tarried for a space
In fabled cities there,
Each spot took on a passing grace
That made the map more fair.

The name of Florence shone as clear
Beneath my curious gaze
As if a Beatrice drew near
To light our darker days.

And Venice by the bridegroom sea
Stood radiant as of yore;

What wonder if its glow for me
A nuptial semblance bore!

In Rome's eternity of youth,
'Gainst every shock secure,
I saw what things of love and truth
May perish yet endure.

So much for Italy: you turned
New countries to salute,—
The map became once more a spurned,
Disreputable boot.

LESBIA'S SPARROW

(From Catullus)

MOURN, Goddesses of Love, and Cupids, mourn,
And men of gentler mould where'er ye be;
My sweetheart's sparrow hath been seized by
Death —

The sparrow, darling of my loved one's heart,
Which she was wont to love more than her eyes;
For he was sweet as honey unto her,
And knew her as a maid her mother knows;
Nor from her bosom was he fain to move,
But hopping round about, now here, now there,
He piped unto his mistress, her alone.
And now along the darksome road he goes
Where never step, men say, has yet turned back.
Then ill betide you, wicked shades of hell,
Which swallow up all lovely things! So fair

A sparrow have ye borne away from her.
The evil deed is done, alas! Poor bird,
It is thy fault that swollen eyes are red
Through weeping, — that my loved one's eyes are
red.

“WHOM THE GODS LOVE”

“WHOM the gods love die young”; — if gods ye be,
Then generously might ye have spared to us
One from your vast unnumbered overplus,
One youth we loved as tenderly as ye.

A GALA DAY

MEN make them ready for the pageant bright
With banners, robes, and panoply of cost,
Yet cannot hold the rain-cloud of a night
From that whereby the brilliance all is lost.

INVESTIGATION

THERE was a simple citizen
Who read the news each day,
And marvelled much that living men
Their trusts could so betray.

“Since all the world is steeped in sin,
Were it not well,” quoth he,
“That some inquiries should begin
At home, like charity?”

And so this very simple man
Put questions to himself,
Though surely ’t was a worn-out plan,
Fit for a dusty shelf.

He asked if he had ever bent
To custom’s smug control,

And made — 't was so expedient —
Small rebates to his soul.

Then how before all-searching eyes
Would show his kindest act?
In what preservatives and dyes
Were half his motives packed?

Honor like his stood so secure
That none could tempt it — still,
Had he, with specious, subtle lure,
Bribed never yet his will?

Thus did the simple citizen
Probe in his private court:
The findings lie beyond our ken —
He's published no report.

THE LAST ACT

IF life's a play — then what of us who sit
Filling the boxes, balconies, and pit?
How strange the drama, when not one of all
Can keep his seat until the curtain fall!
Some stay the first act out, and some the second;
Who see the fourth "old stagers" may be reckoned.
But ere the last is ended, every one
Takes up his cloak, and, looking back, is gone —
Like poor suburbans hurrying for a train,
Longing to see the end, alas! in vain.

AFTER ALL

How shall the storm end? Thus, for me:—
By night, with a west wind strong and free,
Rolling seaward the clouds on high
Like routed squadrons across the sky,
Across the moon that shall change their gray
To the silver-white of a mystic day;
Rifts there shall be, and back, far back,
In the depths of the blue so nearly black,
A few sure stars like eyes shall shine
And say, “Here the storms end, earth’s and thine.”

THE TRAVELLERS

THEY made them ready and we saw them go
Out of our very lives;
Yet this world holds them all,
And soon it must befall
That we shall know
How this one fares, how that one thrives;
And one day — who knows when? —
They shall be with us here again.

Another traveller left us late
Whose life was as the soul of ours;
A stranger guest went with him to the gate,
And closed it breathing back a breath of flowers.
And what the eyes we loved now look upon,
What industries the hands employ,
In what new speech the tongue hath joy,

We may not know — until one day,
And then another, as our toil is done,
The same still guest shall visit us,
And one by one
Shall take us by the hand and say,
“Come with me to the country marvellous,
Where he has dwelt so long beyond your sight.
’T were idle waiting for his own return
That ne’er shall be; face the perpetual light,
And with him learn
Whate’er the heavens unfold of knowledge infinite.”
Each after each then shall we rise,
And follow through the stranger’s secret gate,
And we shall ask and hear, beyond surmise,
What glorious life is his, since desolate
We stood about the bed
Where our blind eyes looked down on him as dead.

“ WHERE IT LISTETH ”

THE wind is like a ravening beast to-night,
Mad for its prey and howling down the trail;
I hear without its baffled snarl and bite,
And feel the shouldering of its fierce assail,
Shaking the rooted walls with hideous din,
And hoarse, as one with shouting, “Let me in!”

Ah, ye who watch this night where sick men lie,
Shelter their sleep as shrewdly as ye may!
So easily this blast that rushes by
Might snatch a fitful breath and whirl away
Into the blackness with it — on and on:
“Whither,” we cry, “oh, whither hath it gone?”

A WINTER ELEGY

(J. F. H.)

To walk beside this winter shore
Was not for his young feet;
Of summer learned he all his lore,
Smiling from life's wide-opened door,
A summer world to greet.

This icy channel's narrowed span
'T was not for him to know;
His current, widening as it ran,
Still smoothly spreads as it began,
Free from our frost and snow.

Like sails of shallop overset,
The floes of ice are borne
Along a tide he knew not yet
Whose boat no chilling blasts had met,
Where Hope's brave flag is torn.

Now he is gone, I would not find
These waters summer-fair,
Girt round with meadows bland and kind;
The rigors of the winter wind
Better befit our care.

Yet sometimes on the snow-wrapped hill
A light at evening lies,
Tender beyond the summer's skill:—
What light, I wonder, fairer still,
Gladdens his absent eyes?

And sometimes, touched by winter's breath,
I thrill with wakened powers.
“Youth still is his,” a whisper saith;
“That searching spirit found not death,
But life — more life than ours.”

THE WAITING DEEDS

(H. K.)

SAY not because the promised deed
Dropped from his hand undone,
His brow shall lack the laurel meed
That conquerors have won.

For pain stood baffled by the smile
That marked him master still,
And we who wished him strength the while
Were stronger for his will.

'T is deed enough for some to be.
Such deed his being was;
And still of potent act is he
The brave and gentle cause:

The hearts that beat with his shall hold
The rhythm his life hath set;
With them through human paths untold
His spirit marcheth yet.

And past the threshold where he stood
We see in cohorts dim
The thousand waiting deeds of good —
Now ours to do, for him!

THE SUNRISE

Blow out the candle, day is come;
The watchers need no other light
Than that which floods the solemn room
Where life is passing with the night.

Across the smiling acres green,
Across the point, the bay, the hills,
Strong, like the soul that loved the scene;
The tide of dawn the chamber fills.

Blow out the candle — small his care
Whose mortal light burns, ah! so dim;
Haply his vision opens where
The eternal sunrise shines for him.

THE SUNRISE

Yes, day is bright about his bed,
And night has vanished with his breath.
Lo! on his face, all shadows fled,
The morning majesty of death.

FOR E. W. H.

THE ABIDING VOICE

ONCE when you left me in a room alone,
Sudden the world seemed void and black,
So that my heart cried, "Were she gone,
Gone, never to come back!

Some day, how will it be?
What will remain for me?"

Then through the open door I heard
Your gentle singing, as you stirred
In some unselfish task,
And in my heart the answering song rang clear,
"God bless her, always near."

Now long miles spread between us, and I ask,
Can we be sundered farther still?
These miles are naught, —
Still I can feel your presence near, your song

Still mingles with my thought
To shame my fears of distant ill,
And make my faltering courage strong:
For listening here I know
That when the miles stretch into infinite space,
Beyond the scope of sense or sight,
Upon my spirit's vision there will glow
Sometimes the semblance of your face,
And on my spirit's ear, attuned aright,
Will fall your gentle singing, by heaven's grace
Borne down to guide me groping in the night,
Unable, but through you, to reach your place.

(1898)

RETURNED

So near she walked beside the stream
That ever from the path she trod
She watched the shining towers that gleam
Above the citadel of God.

And ever from the vision bright
Her eyes were lighted with a ray
That shed on us a heavenly light
And glorified the common day.

Till wandering by the very shore
She entered once the shrouded bark,
That ferries every mortal o'er,
To cross at last the waters dark.

Halfway it sped, then backward turned,
And hearts that wept beside the strand

With grateful joy unhoped-for burned
When safe she came again to land.

Nor was that nearer view for naught:
Once more to earth when she was given,
Back in her generous hands she brought
Fresh lights and fragrances of heaven.

(1904)

FOURSCORE

“ Yet is their strength then but labor and sorrow ”

NAy, not for all, not for the blest

Whose strength it is to bring

From out an antique day the best

The ages gave to them whose quest

Was with the gentle King.

For bringing with them love and light

And courage for new days,

They arm a thousand for the fight,

And fear no falling of the night

On undiscovered ways.

(1906)

THE PRESENCE

*The vision seen from Patmos all may see :
Prophets and poets draw their pictures clear.
More strange the mystery that, beside God's throne,
Christ also dwells on earth. Where dwells He then ?
These eyes that pierce the unseen may surely see
What stalks or steals along our trodden ways.
Where shall I seek, where find, the living Christ ?*

Then hast thou sought where silent thousands kneel
'Neath immemorial arches heavenward wrought
As with God's hand from His own forest aisles? —
Where incense folds and lifts the floating prayer,
And music to the heart's cry lends a voice;
Where listening ears drink in the word of God,
Where wandering eyes rest on the changeless cross
And every symbol of the gentle faith
That made this Christian world the world it is?

There, to thy vision, o'er the multitude
Hovers no form of Christ the Comforter?

*A mystic shape? Yes — there it broods indeed;
Yet for a sign more intimate I yearn.*

Then hast thou marked the Doers of the Word,
Women and men of every clime and tongue,
Cribbed by no builded wall, no cramping name,
Wearing no badge but service to their kind,
Healing the sick and strengthening the poor,
Moulding just laws and ruling righteously,
Spending themselves till all be gladly spent
With opening darkened windows to the light;
Sharing the common lot of common men,
But to such ends that round them day by day
Heaven's kingdom spreads its earthly boundaries?
Mid all this soldiery, this countless host

Whose warfare is the victory of love,
Moves not the Captain plainly to and fro?

*Yes, surely He is there; yet in the press
Of them that minister and them that need,
One can but hearken, “There He passed — and
there”;
One may not stand as he who doubted stood
And marked, past peradventure, hands and side.*

Turn from the many; fix thy gaze on one,
One for whose path His footsteps mark the way —
For such a path must somewhere touch thine own; —
Look on the tokens of His presence there:
Heed in the voice that last sincerity
Which holds pure heart and speech in perfect tune;
Watch in the human eyes the loving look
Of Him whose deeds of mercy still are done.

Again in human weakness see Him brave
To bear the imminent cross, to walk in trust
That Love encompasseth and guideth all,
And so to walk in fearlessness and joy.
Ever more like in outward semblance they
Who move through years of inmost unison;
So to His image hourly grows each one
In whom the Christ His habitation makes,
For not in creed or deed shines He so clear
As in one radiant life aglow with Him;
And daily for a sign shalt thou behold
New Calvaries of self, and from its grave
New resurrections of the living Christ.

*So near, and yet I sought Him far, — all hid
Beneath a guise so plain I scanned it not!
Through all the seeming now His presence flames;
Now in the mortal flesh I feel the wounds.*

(1908)

THE INNER CHAMBER

PEACE dwelt with her, and faith, and gentleness,
And all things else that dwell with souls benign.
Hath she not left these in some visible shrine
Whereunto we may press
In holy pilgrimages, to renew
Our strength that had been weakness but for her?
Nay, there is naught for outward view;
I may not open any door and say,
“Here with these trappings of her mortal day
Some living part of her is yet astir.”

This may not be, but reared within my heart
A secret, inner chamber stands apart,
All furnished forth with her. — There charity
And justice side by side appear,
Not as mere dreams of good,

But as they stood
Embodied in herself unchangeably:
A charity that spread like shafts of light,
Glowing with warmth and radiance near,
Yet searching, reaching every lair of night;
A justice, like God's mercy, fain to see
In every soul an equal weight and worth,
And, seeing, to withhold from none on earth
The bread of love, the cup of sympathy.
And here, the more to glorify the place
With what she was,
Are ancient firm beliefs in the old cause
Of truth eternal, and, through heaven-sent grace,
A smiling courage still by them to live.
Here, too, is humor, warm and sensitive,
Playing like a summer breeze
Through open windows flooded with the sun,
Tempering the air with all felicities
Of true proportion.

Hither I come for solace from the moil
And emptiness without;
And all about
The signs of her — these and so many more! —
Blend as they blent of yore
In aspirations deep
And yearnings oft untold
For them her inmost heart would ever keep
Inviolate from hurt or soil.

These thoughts of her like tapestries enfold
My inner chamber, whence I turn again
Refreshed, renewed to face the world of men.

(1909)

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